



Connections for Sustainability Unification Report



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Connections for Sustainability

In 2011, the City of Greenville was awarded a \$1.8 million combined planning grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The project, entitled “Connections for Sustainability: Linking Greenville’s Neighborhoods to Jobs and Open Space,” aims to build connections between affordable housing, transportation options, economic development opportunities, and open space in Greenville with a focus on the city’s west side.

The first phase of the Connections for Sustainability project concentrated on citywide planning efforts. In doing so, four distinct reports emerged: a *Management Study of the Development Review Process (2011)*, *Citywide Housing Strategy (2012)*, *Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Transit Oriented-Economic Development (TOeD) Feasibility Study (2012)*, and a TOeD zoning overlay report (2013).

To generate grassroots support for Connections for Sustainability, the project incorporated an extensive community outreach program to educate the community and encourage participation in the planning process. A full-time Livability Educator was hired to support the educational component and develop a livability curriculum and studio. A variety of marketing and communication tools were designed and deployed throughout the duration of the project to engage the community.

The second planning phase of the project addressed the specific needs of the City of Greenville’s west side neighborhoods, including Southernside, West End, and West Greenville. This initiative included a plan for a potential park on the site of the City’s current Public Works facility as well as a west side comprehensive plan.

This document includes a summary of each report as well as the concerted strategies used to engage and inform the public throughout multiple planning processes. Its purpose is to communicate the ties between the two planning phases of Connections for Sustainability and the project’s education and outreach components. Ultimately, this document serves to unify these individual project elements into a cohesive whole, as identified in the objectives for Connections for Sustainability.

Citywide Planning

The citywide planning phase addressed fundamental issues extending beyond the west side that affect the way in which the area will grow. These issues included: policy and barriers to development; housing, with specific regard to infill development and a more diverse stock; and access to public transportation. The studies yielded an assessment of the city’s development review process, a citywide housing strategy, a bus rapid transit feasibility study, and a TOeD overlay zone for the city.

Citywide Studies

The *Management Study of the Development Review Process*, completed by Matrix Consulting Group (Matrix) in 2011, was the first citywide report and the first Connections for Sustainability project report. The study provides the City with a set of implementation strategies for improving the development review practices of the City of Greenville to make them more efficient and streamlined.

The *Citywide Housing Strategy (2012)*, created by Development Concepts, Inc. (DCI) of Indianapolis, provides a comprehensive assessment of the City of Greenville's existing housing inventory, current and future projected housing needs, and a strategy for achieving an array of housing options for the City over the coming years. In total, eleven specific strategies help focus housing policy and investment within the city.

To achieve these goals identified in the study, the *Citywide Housing Strategy* focuses on the following four broad areas:

- A desire for growth;
- Infill property development;
- Targeting limited resources; and
- Catalyzing investment for revitalization.

The *BRT and TOeD Feasibility Study*, developed by HDR of Atlanta, evaluates a proposed bus rapid transit (BRT) line linking downtown Greenville and nearby west side with Clemson University's International Center for Automotive Research (CU-ICAR) located on I-85. The goal of the study was to analyze a BRT line's potential for increasing neighborhood and city connectivity with jobs and open space as well as its potential for creating economic development opportunities. Ultimately, the study identifies ten station locations for the proposed BRT line. Each station is evaluated for the feasibility of creating TOeD within a one-quarter-mile proximity of the station. The study then outlines a funding strategy to provide the City with a roadmap for future implementation.

A zoning overlay was created for the city to further complement the infill housing and TOeD initiatives described in the housing and BRT studies. The TOeD overlay zone encourages a mix of homes, business and recreational areas in the areas surrounding the BRT stops. The zoning overlay provides incentives for developers to create infill and denser development in order to achieve an effective TOeD. Essentially, the *Citywide Housing Strategy* helps prepare for a successful TOeD through determining new housing market potential and an analysis of vacant or underutilized properties. This allows the City to better prioritize housing and other infill development to best suit the needs of City residents present and future.

Citywide Connections

The *Citywide Housing Strategy* and the *BRT and TOeD Feasibility Study* are both integral components of overall Connections for Sustainability project goals. The *Citywide Housing Strategy* provides a roadmap for generating affordable housing options while the *BRT and TOeD Feasibility Study* addresses the issue of

creating a more equitable, integrated transportation system. Together, these reports inform project consultants, community stakeholders, neighborhood residents, and City staff on matters relevant to subsequent project components, including the west side comprehensive plan. Addressing these fundamental issues of affordable housing, capturing growth, and access to transit allowed a more realistic and beneficial analysis in the west side comprehensive plan

Both the *Citywide Housing Strategy* and the *BRT and TOeD Feasibility Study* highlight policy areas such as housing, transportation, and TOeD. For example, both reports call for infill development and priority investment policy guidelines. From a housing perspective, the city is mostly built out and thus any growth will likely be in the form of infill. From a transportation and TOeD perspective, infill development will increase residential density thus creating an environment more suitable for a BRT system and TOeD. Both perspectives recognize resources as being limited, indicating efforts to prioritize investments are necessary. The *Citywide Housing Strategy* outlines a set of seven areas for targeted investment while the *BRT and TOeD Feasibility Study* calls for targeted investment in areas with high location efficiency. These two targeted investment areas overlap around the Haywood and Pleasantburg BRT stops as well as in the downtown area. Targeting investments in these areas will unlock potential for both housing and transit/TOeD.

The *Management Study of the Development Review Process* and its resulting strategies put together by Matrix play a less visible role in both the *Citywide Housing Strategy* and *BRT and TOeD Feasibility Study* reports. Development will play a role in both creating a viable BRT corridor and developing a healthy housing market within the City. Therefore, the *Development Review Process* report acts behind-the-scenes to make the development review process easier and more hospitable for developers, and recommendations are already in implementation.

As the project progressed from a citywide focus to targeted planning for the west side community, recommendations from these foundational studies were incorporated in the west side plans, especially within the *Greenville West Side Master Plan*. Incorporating these concepts in the west side comprehensive plan ensures that the growth planned for the community is conducive to other, citywide efforts to facilitate connectedness between the west side and the greater Greenville community.

West Side Planning

The second phase of planning incorporated in Connections for Sustainability concentrated on the west side of Greenville. This portion of the project produced two plans specific to this community, the potential park plan and the west side comprehensive plan.

West Side Plans

The *City Park Master Plan* planning process kicked off in late February of 2013 with a weeklong charrette led by consultants from Seamon Whiteside + Associates. The Connections for Sustainability project team

also worked closely with the City of Greenville Parks and Recreation Department to guide the plan. Greenville residents participated in the Saturday workshop with representation from a variety of age groups and neighborhoods throughout the community. During the following week, second and third graders from AJ Whittenberg Elementary School provided ideas and illustrations to guide the project team.

The potential park would be located along the Reedy River on the site of the City's current Public Works operational facilities. The potential park plan includes a regional playground with disabled-accessible equipment and a sprayground serving as major attractions. Other features include multiuse sports fields, basketball courts, an adult fitness area, a boardwalk and two bridges over the Reedy River. A community garden, visitor's center, and "great lawn" suited for performance entertainment are additional amenities that would serve the community.

Similarly, the *Greenville West Side Master Plan* began during a weeklong charrette facilitated by lead consultants from the Lawrence Group. In addition to an involved week of community input sessions and presentations, several pre-charrette meetings were held to frame the process and generate key concepts to direct focus during the charrette. These meetings included two neighborhood-specific workshops for Southern side and West Greenville and a walk/bike tour of the entire west side community. The tour workshop provided a unique opportunity for the community to experience the west side from the perspective of a pedestrian and bicyclist. Consultants and project staff led groups of citizens on a series of hour-long tours. Infrastructure conditions and general level of comfort were assessed with conversations and recorded observations. Two bike tours and three walking tours were made available to attendees.

The *Greenville West Side Master Plan* included input from a wide array of community leaders, business owners, and interested citizens. Ultimately the plan produced short and long-term recommendations for the west side with regards to seven chapters including:

- Organizing to Empower the Community
- Homegrown Jobs
- Growing a Healthy Community
- Transportation Improvements
- Public Spaces & Infrastructure
- Housing for Everyone
- Development Strategies

Community Outreach

Outreach efforts were strong from the commencement of the project with strategies to reach appropriate audiences efficiently and effectively. However, as the project prepared to transition from a focus on citywide planning efforts to planning for growth in the west side of Greenville, community outreach

efforts became more tailored to reach specific audiences. The outreach efforts were broken into two separate charges of education and outreach and community involvement with distinct objectives for each. While the education and outreach portion refers to the materials, seminars, and events offered to educate the community, the community involvement component is how the project engaged the community in the resources provided through the education and outreach component. The two concepts are closely related, and ultimately, they served to bridge the first and second phase planning efforts together and to fully engage the community in the project

Education and Outreach

Connections for Sustainability's education and outreach component has been a strong effort to make people of all ages aware of ways in which they can incorporate sustainable practices into their daily lives. This element of the project was particularly significant because connections were made with individuals regarding achievable lifestyle adjustments that can continue beyond the duration of the project.

1.1 Livability Educator

The Livability Educator, Jaclin DuRant, was instrumental in educating the community on sustainable practices. Her duties included developing livability curricula for students and teachers, incorporating new programming at A.J. Whittenberg Elementary School, creating a variety of educational materials for kids, securing grants for environmental projects, and teaching in every level of Upstate classrooms.

The livability curriculum produced two major deliverables: *Community Quest* and the *Urban Naturalist Program*. These compilations are interdisciplinary programs designed to facilitate the exploration of community and nature in the urban environment and are designed to be used in conjunction with other sustainable curriculum materials. Another program developed under DuRant is the A.J. Whittenberg Green Team, which is comprised of environmentally-minded students who work to implement programs such as recycling, air quality campaigns, and rain barrel promotion in excess of the school's standard green initiatives. Other supplementary materials produced for the livability curriculum include the *Green Craft Challenge* booklet and the coloring book, *A Tree!*, which provide entertaining activities for children at home while educating them on waste reduction and the significance of trees in the urban environment.

The coloring book was a product of one of two grants secured by DuRant. The TD Green Streets Grant enabled the planting of one hundred trees along South Hudson Street as well as additional educational components for youth and adults including: the "It's a TREEmendous Day in the City" celebration and information session at the West Side Fall Fair; *Greenville's Greener Streets* curriculum supplement; and a price tag installation created in partnership with Upstate Forever showing the value of individual trees.

Another grant secured by the Livability Educator was the Champions of the Environment Grant funded through the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. This grant funded the recycled bottle greenhouse project, which is part of A.J. Whittenberg's outdoor classroom and addresses resource conservation and water quality through green building, recycling, rainwater collection, and education and outreach.

1.2 Community Outreach Program

While the aforementioned efforts of the Livability Educator were highly structured with educational deliverables for the community, this section explores the avenues crafted to reach the community in other ways. These efforts included a project web page and e-newsletter, the Sustainable Conversations and Cinema Series, and several communitywide events.

The Connections for Sustainability website served as the single most comprehensive resource for project updates and information. The site's URL was featured on project publications, and the site provided summaries of the project's major components, displayed news on recent events, and provided a timeline of all events to date. Similarly, a monthly newsletter kept people informed on the project's current and upcoming events.

The newsletter and website also featured educational components contributed by the Livability Educator. *Sustainable Spotlight* is an article featured in the monthly newsletter addressing the incorporation of sustainability into everyday topics. *A Walk in the Woods* is a photo-journal series available through the Connections for Sustainability website. It aims to connect people to the natural environment and introduce them to the ecosystems in the Upstate through a reflection of the Livability Educator's most recent nature hikes.

Other significant components contributing to education and outreach were the Sustainable Speaker and Cinema Series, which were often led by the Livability Educator. These monthly events brought in leaders from the community to speak on topics in sustainability by way of one and a half hour seminars. The speaker series was often in a "lunch-and-learn" format, and the cinema series was held in the evenings with short video selections and guest speakers who gave brief comments on the topic and led conversation after the videos. A wide range of topics were covered for these events, which demonstrated ways to live sustainably through physical and mental health, social responsibility, economic vitality, and community involvement.

To accompany the formal seminars and other regular outreach approaches, Connections for Sustainability also hosted two special events in the spring and fall of 2013. The Spring and Green Fair and the West Side Fall Fair were opportunities to reach out to the community and celebrate the west side's history and character. The events featured educational booths as well as community-building activities. Each fair had an environmental focus, but the fall fair was able to expand on the success of the spring fair and incorporate other themes such as local history and the significance of trees in the urban environment through the inclusion of the TD Green Streets grant component. The Spring and Green Fair included activities for children such as face painting, nature crafts, and a bounce castle. The Fall Fair offered nature crafts and a mobile play station, but the largest attraction was a west side talent show. In-kind donations were made from local businesses and cultural facilities to be awarded as prizes.

The project was able to stay connected with the community by participating at a host of other special events as well. These included TedX, Safe Cities, AJ Whittenberg events, and Furman Earth Day.

Community Involvement

With the wide variety of educational opportunities and outreach events made available to the community, ensuring that people were aware of these opportunities and involved in the project became an important element of Connections for Sustainability. Awareness was achieved through word-of-mouth campaigning, web materials, and three broad approaches described in this section: west side neighborhoods, focus teams, and the project alignment team.

1.3 West Side Neighborhoods

The west side community is comprised of three special emphasis neighborhoods: Southernside, West End, and West Greenville. Each of these neighborhoods has strong and active neighborhood associations, and these groups offered a natural foundation on which to build community involvement strategies. For the duration of Connections for Sustainability, neighborhood associations and their presidents served as invaluable links to facilitate communication between the project team and the entire west side community. Ultimately, a strong reciprocal relationship developed through the Connections project team's continued attendance at the neighborhood meetings.

The Village of West Greenville is another neighborhood whose residents and business owners participated throughout the project. This west side community is known for its commercial district, which has generated a strong arts community over the past decade. Residents and businesses participated in many Connections for Sustainability planning activities, demonstrating their strong commitment to community vibrancy.

1.4 Focus Teams

Beyond the foundation of the various neighborhoods and neighborhood associations that were utilized to encourage community involvement, Connections for Sustainability utilized focus teams to develop initial participation and planning concepts. Four focus teams were developed to align with the project's major initiatives in housing, transportation, economic development, and parks. Groups of fourteen to twenty-two community leaders in their respective fields formed each focus team, and they met monthly to explore the project's four facets. Their work stimulated conversations and provided an initial round of public input for the west side planning phase that ensued. Each group presented their guiding principles and key ideas to the project team and the public in the month prior to the west side comprehensive plan's formal kickoff.

Another resource used to supplement this involvement strategy was Clemson University's Master's of City and Regional Planning 2012 studio. The class of sixteen students was led in part by City of Greenville Community Planner and Connections for Sustainability Project Manager Wayne Leftwich. The students worked closely with the west side community as well as the focus teams to produce a book with pertinent case studies and comments for the direction of the planning process.

1.5 Project Alignment Team

To further support the leadership in involvement from the community groups, Connections for Sustainability hired an Alignment Consultant to coordinate efforts across the multi-faceted project and to lead community outreach strategies. Arnett Muldrow & Associates, a local planning firm, employed a creative range of marketing tools to ensure the community was aware of project events and to encourage attendance. Tools used included standard print and web flyers and mailers, the production of a multi-issue west side newspaper, and radio advertising. This section provides a summary of community outreach strategies used, but the *Community Outreach Summary* offers an extensive review of the work including participation numbers and marketing images.

The most frequent marketing methods used were graphic flyers and mailers. Flyers and handouts were used to promote nearly every event, and each piece was crafted by a graphic designer and tailored to its specific event. Themes, such as a color palette, fonts, and project logos, resonated throughout the collection of marketing materials to establish a brand for the project, but a variety of graphics and styles were used to promote specific events. Materials included quarter-page mailers used to promote upcoming events, half-page promotional pieces for mass distribution to the community through local institutions, and letter and legal-sized flyers to post in willing storefronts and businesses. Excluding the mailers, these materials were hand delivered to local businesses and churches throughout the west side to be made available to their constituents.

More unique marketing strategies included the creation of *The West Side Connection*, an eight-page community newspaper, and multiple radio advertisements, which were both used to market the major events in the west side planning phase. The first edition of the newspaper was issued the week prior to the west side planning charrette, and the second edition was issued in the week prior to the fall fair. Five thousand copies of each edition were distributed via mail and hand delivery to residences, businesses, churches, community centers, and cultural facilities in and around the study area. The radio spots ran two weeks prior to each of these major events on two stations, 107.3 JAMZ and Chuck 97.7 FM. Two versions of the charrette promotion ran, and one version of the fall fair promotion ran. The Connections for Sustainability Project Manager also interviewed with local host Rhonda Rawlings on her Sunday morning show, *Pause for the Cause*. The fifteen-minute interview promoted the project and invited the community to participate in the west side charrette the following week.

Conclusion

The multi-year planning project, Connections for Sustainability, has successfully engaged the Greenville community to produce reports that will strengthen connections – regarding housing, transportation, economic development, and open space – between the west side neighborhoods and the rest of the community. The significance of this project will grow over time as Greenville continues to change, and having these planning tools now will help ensure that this expected growth will be well managed and sustainable. Although recommendations from these reports may span decades into the future, the common vision they describe is supported through current planning efforts.

The reports from the first phase of the project approached these major connections from a citywide perspective to assess the broader setting in which the west side finds itself. More specifically, the housing report, BRT study, development review process, and zoning overlay documents produced serve to address the potential direction for growth in Greenville. The reports from the second phase of the project provide a more narrowly tailored perspective on growth to the west side. While the potential park plan and west side comprehensive plan are largely focused on long-term concepts, they help shape a vision specifically for the west side as it faces imminent change. More significantly, all of the reports work together to define the predicted development patterns in Greenville and how the west side can sustainably flourish within this expected framework.